

Conference Title: National Disability Forum "Equity in SSA Programs: Hidden Barriers" Equity in Claimant Representation

Moderator: Barbara Silverstone

Date: September 15, 2021 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM ET

DUE TO TECHNICAL ISSUES, PART OF THE TRANSCRIPT IS MISSING

JACKIE DAI: >> PREHEARING CONFERENCE WOULD ENSURE THAT THE CASES COULD BE PROCESSED A LITTLE BIT FASTER AND EVIDENCE COULD BE COMPLETE. AND WHETHER OR NOT THE EVIDENCE IS COMPLETE IT CAN BE DONE EARLIER IN THE PROCESS. SO, THERE'S LESS RUSH FOR BOTH ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES AND ALL OF THE CLAIMANTS' REPRESENTATIVES ACROSS THE BOARD. SO, IT'S A WIN-WIN FOR EVERYONE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU, THANK YOU. THESE ARE SOME REALLY GREAT IDEAS. LET ME MOVE ON NOW TO A QUESTION ABOUT TECHNOLOGY, AND I'M GOING TO ADDRESS THIS ONE TO YOU, REZ. THE RECENT PANDEMIC HAS MADE IT EVIDENT HOW ESSENTIAL ONLINE SERVICES ARE, PARTICULARLY FOR CUSTOMERS FACING BARRIERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, MANY ADVOCATES SAY THAT THESE CUSTOMERS NEITHER HAVE ACCESS TO OR THE SUFFICIENT KNOW-HOW TO UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY, AND IN-PERSON SERVICES ARE NECESSARY. IN YOUR OPINION, HOW CAN THE AGENCY UTILIZE BOTH TO BEST SERVE THESE CUSTOMERS TO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON REPRESENTATION, TIMELINESS AND EFFICIENT ADJUDICATION OF A CLAIM.

REZ ISLAM: >> WELL, I MEAN, AS THE QUESTION STATES, I MEAN, ONLINE SERVICES ARE DEFINITELY A VALUABLE TOOL AND SHOULD BE USED TO AUGMENT AND IMPROVE IN-PERSON SERVICES BUT SHOULD NEVER BE THOUGHT TO REPLACE IN-PERSON SERVICES. THERE'S CERTAIN SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION AND CERTAIN CUSTOMERS, THE ONES THAT, YOU KNOW, ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED IN THIS ONE, THAT DO BENEFIT FROM ONLINE SERVICES, THE ONES THAT ARE, PERFECTLY CAPABLE BUT LIVE IN REMOTE AREAS, OR FAMILY MEMBERS THAT ARE HELPING THEIR PARENTS OR CHILDREN, MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE OFF FROM WORK OR SOMETHING TO BE ABLE TO GO DOWN TO THE OFFICE IN PERSON. BUT FROM THE CLIENTS THAT WE SEE, MOST TYPICALLY, YOU KNOW, THEY ARE DISABLED OR ELDERLY, THEY ARE UNABLE TO NAVIGATE THESE ONLINE TOOLS. THEY ARE NOT ABLE TO DO THE ONLINE SERVICES THE WAY THAT SOCIAL SECURITY IMAGINES THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO. SO, SOME OF THE ONLY TIMES THEY ARE ABLE TO REALLY GET THE HELP THEY NEED IS WHEN THEY SHOW UP AT PLACES, SHOW UP AT THE LOCAL SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE, THE LOCAL DSS. AND THEN WHEN WE ARE OPEN, OUR OFFICE, YOU KNOW, AND THEN ANY OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO ACCESS. SO ANY ORGANIZATION THAT DEALS -- THAT A LARGE MEMBER OF THEIR, THE POPULATION THAT THEY SERVE IS DISABLED, ELDERLY, OR DISABLED, ELDERLY, OR OTHERWISE UNABLE TO REALLY LIVE A FULL LIFE, THEY NEED TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS OUR SERVICES, LIKE THE IN-PERSON SERVICES ARE ESSENTIAL. IT'S, YOU KNOW, HAVING HEARINGS IN PERSON I THINK IS THE GOLD STANDARD. WHILE THROUGH THE PANDEMIC THE LOCAL OFFICES HAVE ALL BEEN CLOSED, AND IT'S BEEN REALLY HARD FOR OUR CLIENTS TO GET EVEN VERY BASIC THINGS DONE; WHEREAS, IN THE PAST WE WOULD BE ABLE TO GET APPLICATIONS, APPOINTMENTS TO HELP COMPLETE APPLICATIONS. WE WOULD MAKE THOSE APPOINTMENTS. NOW THEY CAN ONLY BE DONE OVER THE PHONE. SOMEONE CAN'T HAVE -- IF SOMEONE CAN'T STAY ON THE PHONE BECAUSE THEIR PHONES DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MINUTES, OR THEY JUST DON'T HAVE THE ABILITY TO BE ON THE PHONE FOR AN HOUR AND-A-HALF,

THEY NEED TO BE ABLE TO GO TO THESE OFFICES AND GET THESE THINGS AND BE ABLE TO FINISH THESE APPLICATIONS. IT'S ALSO BEEN VERY HARD TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS TO JUST SOLVE SIMPLE THINGS. A RECENT EMERGENCY MESSAGE SORT OF ADDRESSED SOME OF THESE THINGS WHERE YOU WERE REQUIRING THAT WE SUBMIT, YOU KNOW, CERTAIN CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS LIKE PASSPORTS OR OTHER BIRTH CERTIFICATES, THAT WE MAIL THEM IN. BUT NOW WE'RE ABLE TO IN DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES ABLE TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS SO WE COULD VERIFY THE AUTHENTICITY OF THOSE DOCUMENTS. BUT I THINK THAT'S JUST -- IT'S A SMALL HELP, BUT I THINK IN-PERSON SERVICES ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR THE POPULATIONS THAT WE SERVE, OR INDIGENT POPULATIONS THAT ARE LESS ABLE AND ELDERLY. AND THERE CAN'T BE ANYTHING THAT WE THINK THAT CAN ACTUALLY REPLACE IT, JUST BECAUSE OF THE WAY -- JUST BECAUSE OF THE LIVES THAT OUR CLIENTS LIVE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> I THINK THAT'S KEY THAT -- WE HEARD SOME OF THAT THIS MORNING ALSO, THE NEED TO OPEN OFFICES AND OFFER IN-PERSON SERVICES. DORIS, DID YOU WANT TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE ISSUES ON THIS, THE TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS?

DORIS CORTES: >> YES, I DEFINITELY WANT TO REITERATE WHAT REZ IS SAYING. THESE OFFICES SHOULD BE OPEN, EVEN IF IT'S FOR A LIMITED AMOUNT OF PEOPLE, FOR APPOINTMENTS AS NECESSARY, BUT THEY SHOULD BE OPEN. IT'S VERY DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS OR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, OR EVEN THE HEARING-IMPAIRED TO GET ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY BY PHONE. IT'S DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. I'VE BEEN ON HOLD WITH PEOPLE WHO ONLY SPEAK SPANISH, AND ONCE YOU GET THROUGH, IT'S LIKE, OKAY, THEY SPEAK SPANISH, WELL, WE HAVE TO PASS YOU TO ANOTHER PERSON. SO, THEN IT'S A LONGER WAIT. AND SO, JUST AGAIN, TO REITERATE WHAT REZ HAS SAID, IS THAT, YOU KNOW, SOME PEOPLE DO HAVE LIMITED TIME THEY CAN BE ON THE PHONE. PHYSICALLY, IT COULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM, ATTENTION SPAN, MENTAL HEALTH. WE HAVE TO THINK ABOUT ALL THAT INTO CONSIDERATION. SO, I THINK IT'S REALLY OPEN -- THAT THEY REOPEN THESE OFFICES. FILING APPEALS -- YOU CAN'T FILE AN APPEAL ONLINE IF YOU CAN'T READ THE INFORMATION. IF IT'S ONLY IN ENGLISH, IT'S NOT FEASIBLE TO EXPECT CLAIMANTS TO DO THIS. ALTHOUGH ONLINE SERVICES IS GREAT, I THINK THEY NEED TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO EITHER GO IN-PERSON OR DO IT ONLINE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE>> THANK YOU, THANK YOU.

REZ ISLAM: >> BARBARA, I WOULD JUST LIKE TO ADD, YOU KNOW, FROM OUR EXPERIENCE WHEN DEALING WITH THE OFFICES BEFOREHAND, WHEN THEY WERE OPEN, WE ALSO FOUND THAT IT WAS HELPFUL I THINK TO SOME DEGREE TO HAVE EVERYONE -- TO HAVE THE WORKER NEAR, AN ANALYST, WHO SPECIALIZES IN CERTAIN AREAS OF -- AND CERTAIN TOPICS THAT MIGHT COME UP OVER A PHONE CALL. HAVING ALL OF THAT INFORMATION CLOSE BY AND READY AT HAND, I THINK JUST BETTER SERVES THE PUBLIC, RATHER THAN, YOU KNOW, WHOEVER IS ON THEIR PHONE. WHOEVER YOU GET ON THE PHONE MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW THE ANSWER. AND IT'S JUST A BETTER SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC. IF ALL THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SOCIAL SECURITY HAS AVAILABLE IS ABLE TO BE, YOU KNOW, USED TO HELP SERVE THE CUSTOMERS AND THE PUBLIC.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANKS. THIS IS OBVIOUSLY A VERY BIG AND IMPORTANT TOPIC AMONG REPRESENTATIVES AND I'M GOING TO CALL ON BOTH NICOLE AND JACKIE TO ADD SOME THOUGHTS ON THIS, ALSO. NICOLE, DO YOU WANT TO GO AHEAD?

NICOLE DOOLEY: >> THANK YOU.

NICOLE DOOLEY: >> AND I JUST WANT TO EMPHASIZE A FEW POINTS AS ALREADY MADE, ESPECIALLY FOR OUR POPULATION WHO EARN VERY LITTLE INCOME, THEY OFTEN DON'T HAVE INTERNET ACCESS AT HOME OR DON'T HAVE A COMPUTER. THEY JUST DON'T HAVE A DEVICE THAT THEY CAN USE TO ACCESS ONLINE SERVICES. SO, FOR THEM IT'S EXTREMELY CRITICAL TO BE ABLE TO GO IN-PERSON OR, MANY ALSO AS REZ MENTIONED, DON'T HAVE THE CELLPHONE MINUTES TO SIT ON THE PHONE FOR HOURS AND CALL SOCIAL SECURITY. SO, I JUST WANTED TO DOUBLE DOWN OR TRIPLE DOWN ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING IN-PERSON SERVICES AVAILABLE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU, THANK YOU. AND JACKIE?

JACKIE DAI: >> I WANTED TO ADD THAT FOR PEOPLE THAT ARE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT OR ARE DEAF OR HARD-OF-HEARING, IT'S REALLY DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE THE PHONE TREE, WHEN THEY CALL INTO THE SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE. REZ TOUCHED UPON THE LONG WAIT TIMES. DORIS DID. NICOLE DID AS WELL. BUT IMAGINE TRYING TO NAVIGATE THAT IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THE PERSON IS SAYING ON THE OTHER ONLINE. MOST OF THE CLAIMANTS THAT I'VE WORKED WITH THEY GIVE UP AND THEY JUST HANG UP AND THEY REACH OUT TO ONE OF OUR OFFICES, THE LEGAL AID OFFICES FOR ASSISTANCE BECAUSE WE PROVIDE INTERPRETATION. AND I HAPPEN TO BE BILINGUAL IN MANDARIN. SO, I'M ABLE TO CALL WITH THEM TOGETHER ON THE PHONE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU, THANK YOU. I THINK WE'VE SEEN DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT SSI APPLICANTS, APPLICATIONS HAVE -- THE NUMBER OF SSI APPLICATIONS HAVE GONE DOWN DURING THE PANDEMIC, AND I THINK A LOT OF WHAT YOU JUST DISCUSSED PROBABLY COVERS A LOT OF THE REASON OF THAT. PEOPLE CAN'T GO TO THE OFFICE. THEY CAN'T SUBMIT DOCUMENTS. AND THE SSI CLAIMANTS MAY NOT UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE TECHNOLOGY OR HAVE ENOUGH FREE MINUTES ON THEIR PHONE TO WAIT ON HOLD. SO, THAT'S ANOTHER ONE OF THE ISSUES WITH THE TECHNOLOGY. SO, IF NO ONE ELSE HAS ANYTHING ON THAT TOPIC, WHY DON'T WE MOVE ON AND LAURA, WELCOME, I'M SORRY THAT YOU HAD SO MUCH TROUBLE GETTING ON.

MARIA LAURA SIGAUD>> THANKS.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE>> THAT'S SOME OF OUR CHALLENGES WITH TECHNOLOGY, AND WE'RE THE REPRESENTATIVES, SO THERE YOU SEE IT. BUT YOU'RE JUST IN TIME FOR THE QUESTION THAT I WANT TO ADDRESS TO YOU THAT SOME COMMENTATORS SAY THAT REPRESENTATIVES DON'T TAKE ON CERTAIN CASES, BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT PROMISING, MEANING THEY MAY YIELD SMALL PAYOUTS OR ARE UNLIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL. OFTEN THESE ARE SSI CASES FOR INITIAL OR RECONSIDERATION CASES. IN YOUR OPINION, WOULD A STANDARD OR BASE PAY FOR REPRESENTATIVES OR ANOTHER CHANGE IN THE FEE PAYMENT RULES IN CERTAIN CASES BE FAIR, AND WOULD IT MOTIVATE THEM TO TAKE ON THESE CASES, OR WOULD ANOTHER TYPE OF MOTIVATION BE NEEDED?

LAURA SIGAUD: >> WELL, I THINK THAT PERHAPS THE REMEDY WOULD BE EITHER TO HAVE THE FLAT FEE OR A MINIMUM FEE. BUT IT SHOULD EXPRESSLY SAY THAT THOSE FEES WOULD ONLY GO TO ATTORNEYS OR REPRESENTATIVES THAT HAVE BEEN CERTIFIED BY THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION. I THINK PART OF THE PROBLEM WITH IT IS THAT THE AMOUNT OF SSI BENEFITS AND RETROACTIVE BENEFITS CAN BE VERY LOW. RIGHT NOW, THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL IS \$12,880 FOR 2021. SO, SOME OF THE THINGS THAT COULD BE DONE IS INCREASING THE SSI BENEFIT RATE TO AT LEAST 100% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL. AND THEN ANNUALLY ADJUSTING IT TO KEEP PACE WITH INFLATION. THAT'S PART OF, AS MANY MIGHT KNOW, PART OF THE SSI RESTORATION ACT WHICH WAS

INTRODUCED AS A BILL IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR AND ALSO IN THE SENATE. SO, SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT MIGHT INCREASE THE FEE WOULD BE ELIMINATING IN-KIND SUPPORT, MAINTENANCE AS A TYPE OF COUNTABLE INCOME, INCREASING -- INDEXING RESOURCE LIMITS FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1989. ALSO UPDATING THE EARNED AND GENERAL INCOME DISREGARDS, WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN ADJUSTED SINCE 1974. AND ALSO, ELIMINATING PAYMENT REQUIREMENTS AND EXTENDING THE TIME FOR SSI RECIPIENTS TO SPEND DOWN RESOURCES. SO, AS FAR AS THE OTHER PART OF YOUR QUESTION WITH REGARDS TO THE CASES NOT BEING WINNABLE, I THINK THERE'S A VERY GOOD STUDY OUT THERE BY CARLY URBAN AND ISAAC SWENSEN IN AUGUST OF 2021, THE EFFECTS OF EXPANDING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ON SSI APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS. THAT EXPLAINS IN AN OVERVIEW WHAT THE PROBLEM IS, AND THAT IS THAT A LOT OF SSI CLAIMANTS GO TO THESE INDIGENT HEALTH CARE CLINICS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS, AND THE WAIT TIMES ARE, IN THOSE OUT-PATIENT CLINICS CAN SPAN WEEKS TO MONTHS. LONGER WAIT TIMES LEAD TO LESS FAVORABLE OUTCOMES. THOSE ARE JUST PART OF THE PROBLEMS THAT WE'RE SEEING. AND SO, I THINK A SOLUTION IS AT THE FIELD OFFICE WHEN THE CLAIMANT IS APPLYING, ESPECIALLY SSI CLAIMANTS, THEY SHOULD HAVE -- GIVE THEM SOME KIND OF INFORMATION WHICH WOULD LET THEM KNOW GO DOWN AND APPLY, REQUEST A RECEIPT STATING HOW LONG THEY ARE ON THE WAITING LIST AND, OR A DENIAL LETTER, WHICHEVER ONE THEY GET, SO THEY CAN SUBMIT IT AS EVIDENCE THAT THE CASE SHOULD NOT BE DENIED BECAUSE OF LACK OF TREATMENT OR BEING DENIED. SO THOSE ARE JUST SOME OF THE SUGGESTIONS THAT I HAD. I CAN SPEAK A LITTLE BIT MORE IF YOU WOULD LIKE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> SURE, SURE.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> OKAY, SO ONE OF THE MORE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES ABOUT THE SSI RESTORATION ACT IS THAT IT WOULD -- IF IT PASSES IT WOULD INCREASE THE RESOURCE LIMIT FROM \$2,000, 3,000 FOR AN ELIGIBLE COUPLE TO \$10,000 OR \$20,000 FOR AN ELIGIBLE COUPLE. I MEAN, RIGHT NOW \$2,000 IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH FOR SSI RECIPIENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO LIKE A VERY NECESSARY HOUSE REPAIR OR A CAR REPAIR, SOMETHING THAT THEY NEED. ALSO, THE EARNED INCOME DISREGARD FROM THE CURRENT \$65 WOULD BE INCREASED TO \$416 PER MONTH. I THINK WE ALSO NEED TO GIVE SSI CLAIMANTS AN INCENTIVE TO TRY AND WORK AND ALLOW THEM A TRIAL WORK PERIOD THE SAME WAY THAT THAT IS ALLOWED WITH SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY INSURANCE BENEFITS, ALLOW THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST THEIR ABILITY TO WORK WITHOUT BEING PENALIZED FOR IT. LET'S SEE. RIGHT NOW, THE GENERAL INCOME DISREGARD IS \$20, \$20. AND THAT HAS NOT BEEN UPDATED SINCE I WANT TO SAY THE 70s. SO IT WOULD GO FROM INCREASING IT TO \$128 PER MONTH. SO -- BECAUSE THE COST OF LIVING IS MORE THAN FIVE AND-A-HALF TIMES WHAT IT WAS BACK -- IT WAS 1972. SO, 128, \$128 IS EQUAL TO JUST UNDER \$20 IN 1972. THOSE ARE SOME OF THE EXAMPLES. LET ME SEE. HAVE I ANSWERED YOUR QUESTION?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> YES, I THINK THAT YOU DID. I THINK THAT YOU DID. AND I THINK THAT DAN HAD SOME POINTS HE WANTED TO ADD TO THIS AS WELL. THERE YOU GO.

DAN BOTT: >> THERE WE GO.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> UNMUTED AND SPOTLIGHTED, WOW.

DAN BOTT: >> OH, GOODNESS, LET ME --

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> NO, NO. I THINK THE ORGANIZER SPOTLIGHTED YOU --

DAN BOTT: >> OH, LOOK AT THAT. OKAY. WELL, PERFECT, PERFECT. SO JUST A COUPLE OF THINGS HERE. WHEN WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SHOULD THERE BE SOME TYPE OF MINIMUM FEE OR SOMETHING, ONE OF THE QUESTIONS THAT IT ASKS IS, IS THIS FAIR TO THE CLAIMANT TO HAVE A MINIMUM FEE? AND I THINK THAT'S A VERY LEGITIMATE QUESTION THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED. BUT WHAT WE HAVE TO BE LOOKING AT HERE IS WHAT BENEFIT DOES THE CLAIMANT GET BECAUSE OF THE CASE BEING APPROVED. AND IN ONE OTHER AREA OF LIFE WOULD WE SAY THAT THE DOCTOR WHO IS SEEING THE CLAIMANT TO ADDRESS THEIR MEDICAL CONCERNS, OR THE ACCOUNTANT THAT FILES THEIR TAXES OR AT LEAST DIFFERENT THINGS, WHICH OF THESE PROFESSIONALS WOULD WE SAY SHOULDN'T GET A FEE OR AT LEAST A GUARANTEED MINIMUM FOR THE WORK THEY DO IN HELPING THE PERSON? AND SO, AGAIN, IF THERE'S A BENEFIT TO SOMEBODY BECAUSE OF THE SERVICE BEING OFFERED, I THINK WE CAN SAY THAT THE MINIMUM FEE IS FAIR. BUT ANOTHER QUESTION THAT WE NEED TO BE LOOKING AT IS IF WE CREATE A MINIMUM FEE DOES IT HELP ALIGN EVERYBODY'S INTERESTS? BECAUSE WHEN WE ALIGN PEOPLE'S INTERESTS AND GET US ALL ON THE SAME PAGE, WE WORK TOGETHER MORE EFFICIENTLY. IF CLAIMANTS ARE REPRESENTED WITH GOOD REPRESENTATIVES, THEY HAVE A GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF BEING APPROVED. SO, GETTING APPROVED FASTER IS IN THEIR BEST INTEREST. ATTORNEYS MAKING SURE THAT THEY CAN BE PAID EVEN IF THE CASE IS APPROVED FAST IS IN THE ATTORNEY'S BEST INTEREST. SSA WANTS TO SEE CLAIMS PROCESSED AS SMOOTHLY AND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. AND HAVING A REPRESENTATIVE HELP IN THAT, AGAIN, ALIGNS EVERYONE'S INTEREST SO IT IS AT THE SAME POINT. IF WE DID HAVE SOME TYPE OF MINIMUM FEE AT THE INITIAL RECONSIDERATION, AND I WOULD ARGUE EVEN AT THE HEARING LEVEL, I THINK IT DOES ALIGN EVERYBODY ON TO THE SAME PAGE. AND I WOULD ARGUE THAT EVEN HAVING THAT MINIMUM FEE THE SAME ACROSS THE BOARD, INCENTIVIZES THE REPRESENTATIVES TO GET THAT CASE APPROVED AS FAST AS POSSIBLE. NOW TO DO THAT THERE'S SOME THINGS THAT WE TOUCHED ON EARLIER THAT I THINK, YOU KNOW, WOULD BE REALLY IMPORTANT, GOING BACK TO DEVELOPING CASES, MEDICAL EVIDENCE. A LOT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN MAKING ARS, AND ARE MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR REPRESENTATIVES AT THE INITIAL RECONSIDERATION LEVELS. RIGHT NOW, IT TAKES A VERY, VERY, LONG TIME ONCE WE SUBMIT REP PAPERWORK FOR THAT TO BE ENTERED INTO THE ARS SYSTEM AND FOR US TO ACTUALLY HAVE ACCESS TO ARS ON THE CASE. FIXING THAT, MAKING IT MUCH, MUCH FASTER WOULD BE VERY BENEFICIAL, AND THEN WORKING MORE CLOSELY BETWEEN THE AGENCY AND REPRESENTATIVES TO DEVELOP THESE CASES IN A WAY THAT MAKES FINANCIAL SENSE FOR EVERYBODY AND HELPS PROCESS THE CLAIMS FASTER, WOULD HELP WITH ALL OF THAT. SO, I THINK THAT ALSO NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED. BUT BACK TO THE MAIN THEME, YES, I DO THINK SOME TYPE OF MINIMUM FEE ON THESE CASES WOULD INCENTIVIZE MORE REPRESENTATION AT THE EARLIER LEVELS AND ON THESE YOUNGER SSI-ONLY CLAIMANTS.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU, DAN. WHAT OTHERS HAVE ALSO SAID IS IT'S NOT ONLY THE AMOUNT OF THE FEE BUT THE PROCESSING TIME TO RECEIVE A FEE THAT BECOMES A DETERRENT TO TAKING SOME OF THESE CASES. SO, YOU KNOW, I THINK THAT IF SOCIAL SECURITY COULD PUT SOME RESOURCES BEHIND THE APPROVAL AND THE PAYMENT OF FEES, THERE WOULD BE MORE REPRESENTATION OF SOME OF THESE SMALLER PAYOUT, TO USE THAT TERM, CASES. AS YOU MENTIONED, THERE'S ALSO THE ISSUE WITH ACCESS TO THE FILES, ACCESS TO COMMUNICATING WITH DDS, WITH THE FIELD OFFICES, THAT MAKES REPRESENTING CLIENTS AT RECON, WHICH ARE GENERALLY THE ONES THAT HAVE THESE SMALLER PAYOUTS, THE MOST DIFFICULT. DOES ANYBODY ELSE WANT TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE PROBLEMS FACED BY REPRESENTATIVES IN REPRESENTING CLIENTS AT THE

INITIAL AND RECON LEVEL, SPECIFICALLY WHEN IT COMES TO SHOWING THAT RECORDS ARE IN THE FILE OR COMMUNICATING WITH SOCIAL SECURITY AT THAT LEVEL?

JACKIE DAI: >> THIS IS JACKIE, SURE. I THINK THAT IF THERE IS ACCESS FOR AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES AND ATTORNEYS, CLAIMANTS' REPRESENTATIVES, TO THE MYSSA ACCOUNT, IT WOULD MAKE IT A LOT A LOT EASIER FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED BECAUSE THE NATURE OF THE CLIENTS THAT COME INTO OUR OFFICES, THEY OFTEN DON'T HAVE ACCESS. THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACCESS IT AND IT'S A PROCESS THAT CAN BE ARDUOUS FOR THEM, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT THE OFFICES ARE CURRENTLY CLOSED. SO, I THINK IF THAT COULD BE ESTABLISHED IT WOULD BE MUCH EASIER FOR EVERYONE THAT IS PRACTICING IN THIS AREA.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> CAN I JUMP IN ON THAT?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> YES, PLEASE.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT AND I'M JUST PIGGYBACKING ON WHAT SHE SAID IS IN 2019 SOCIAL SECURITY CHANGED ITS POLICY ABOUT COLLATERAL ESTOPPEL AND SO IF YOU DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THE FILES AT THE INITIAL RECONSIDERATION LEVEL IT'S GOING TO BE REALLY DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE IF THE SAME CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING OR DECIDING DISABILITY ARE USED, AND ESPECIALLY WITH THE CHANGES TO THE NEW MEDICAL LISTINGS. BECAUSE BASICALLY SOCIAL SECURITY, IF THEY FIND THAT THE CHANGES WOULD -- IF THE CHANGES TO THE MEDICAL LISTINGS AND VOCATIONAL POLICY WOULD CHANGE THE OUTCOME, THEN THEY BASICALLY TREAT IT LIKE A CDR. I BELIEVE THAT I'M CORRECT ON THIS. SO, WE ABSOLUTELY NEED TO HAVE ACCESS TO THOSE FILES. THIS WHOLE NEW POLICY HAS RESULTED IN ADVERSE DETERMINATIONS WHICH ARE IN CONFLICT WITH THE ESTABLISHED FINDINGS IN THE EXISTING CLAIM, WHICH THEY ARE, LIKE I SAID, EFFECTIVELY CONTINUING DISABILITY REVIEW SO THAT THE MEDICAL IMPROVEMENT STANDARDS APPLY.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU, THANK YOU. THAT CHANGE IN COLLATERAL ESTOPPEL HAD BEEN VERY CHALLENGING FOR MANY CLAIMANTS. LET'S SEE, BEFORE WE MOVE ON TO OPEN QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE, I JUST WANT TO GIVE OUR PANELISTS ANOTHER CHANCE. IF ANYBODY MISSED SOMETHING, THEY WANTED TO SAY ABOUT ONE OF THESE QUESTIONS, CHIME IN NOW, AND I'LL GIVE YOU A FEW SECONDS TO THINK ABOUT THAT. AND IF NOT, WE'LL MOVE ON TO OUR PANELISTS QUESTIONS WHICH ARE COMING IN. AGAIN, IF ATTENDEES WANT TO SEND A QUESTION, PLEASE SEND IT TO NATIONALDISABILITYFORUM, ALL ONE WORD. NATIONALDISABILITYFORUM@SSA.GOV, AND PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR NAME AND WHERE YOU'RE FROM. SO, WHY DON'T WE START WITH THE VERY FIRST QUESTION THAT WAS RECEIVED, AND IT'S FAIRLY LONG, SO, IT DOES HAVE TO DO WITH CESSATIONS. SO, LET ME READ THAT, READ THIS QUESTION OUT. DISABILITY CESSATION CASES SEEM TO BE ONE OF THE LARGER AREAS WHERE INDIVIDUALS DO NOT RECEIVE REPRESENTATION AS COMPARED TO APPLICATIONS FOR DISABILITY. THE MAIN BARRIER TO REPRESENTATION IS THE FEAR ATTORNEYS HAVE ON ENTERING INTO THESE CASES BECAUSE OF THE ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE RISK OF NOT BEING PAID. OFTEN TIMES IT IS HARD TO RECEIVE ADEQUATE FUNDS FROM THE CLAIMANT TO BE HELD IN TRUST WHICH RESULTS IN ATTORNEYS NOT BEING PAID FOR THEIR WORK ON CASES. SO, THIS POSTER SAYS THAT, THE POSTER WOULD ARGUE THAT IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL FOR SOCIAL SECURITY TO CONSIDER THE CREATION OF A FORM OR AGREEMENT FOR CLAIMANTS TO SIGN WHERE 25% OF THEIR ACTIVE PAYMENTS ARE HELD BY SOCIAL SECURITY WHILE PROCEEDING THROUGH THE CESSATION PROCESS. THOSE FUNDS WOULD BE HELD FOR THE

REPRESENTATIVE IF THE CLAIMANT IS SUCCESSFUL IN DEFENDING THEIR RIGHTS TO BENEFITS. THIS WOULD RESULT IN LESS RISK FOR ATTORNEYS AND MORE REPRESENTATION FOR INDIVIDUALS. IF CESSATION IS CONFIRMED, THEN THE OVERPAYMENT REQUESTED BY THE SOCIAL SECURITY IS REDUCED BECAUSE 25% WAS ALREADY BEING HELD BY THE AGENCY. SO, THE POSTER WOULD LIKE TO GET THE PANELS THOUGHTS ON THIS FORM, ON THIS FORMAT TO HELP INCREASE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION IN THIS SECTOR OF SOCIAL SECURITY CLAIMS. SO BASICALLY, THE ISSUE IS WHETHER A CLAIMANT SHOULD BE ABLE TO AGREE TO HAVE HIS OR HER PAYMENTS BEING WITH, HIS OR HER MONTHLY BENEFITS THAT HE IS RECEIVING WHILE, WHILE THE CDR IS BEING PROCESSED, TO BE HELD BY SOCIAL SECURITY FOR DIRECT PAYMENT TO THE REPRESENTATIVE. IT'S, I WOULD, I WOULD OPEN THIS UP TO, TO ANY OF YOU. WE HAVE TWO PRIVATE ATTORNEYS AND FOUR LEGAL SERVICES ATTORNEYS ON, ON THE PANEL. SO, THERE MAY BE, YOU MAY BE COMING AT THIS IN DIFFERENT, IN DIFFERENT WAYS. I DON'T KNOW. DAN, DID YOU WANT TO START THIS? I DIDN'T REMEMBER IF YOU SAID THAT YOU DID OR NOT.

DAN BOTT: >> WELL, I DIDN'T BUT I WILL. I'M HAPPY TO. ANOTHER QUESTION CAME IN, AND QUESTION NUMBER SIX I THINK IS VERY, VERY SIMILAR TO THIS, ON SHOULD THERE BE A MINIMUM FEE ON CDR CASES AND WHAT SHOULD THAT BE? THIS PROPOSAL OF WITHHOLDING 25%, I DON'T KNOW HOW POPULAR THAT WOULD BE. I MEAN, IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY CREATE AN INCENTIVE. IT WOULD MAKE SURE THAT THERE IS MONEY SET ASIDE THAT COULD COVER A FEE IN THE EVENT THAT, THAT THE ATTORNEY OR REPRESENTATIVE IS SUCCESSFUL IN, IN THE OVERPAYMENT CASE OR WHATEVER IT IS WE ARE DEALING WITH. AND I MEAN THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING WITH THAT. AND AGAIN, THE OTHER OPTION WOULD BE SOME TYPE OF MINIMUM FEE THAT WE ESTABLISH OR 25% OR A MINIMUM FEE OR WHATEVER IT IS, AND THEN HAVE THAT, A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THAT WITHHELD OUT OF ONGOING BENEFITS. BECAUSE AGAIN, THE NUMBER ONE PROBLEM THAT I RUN INTO WHEN, WHEN POTENTIAL CLIENTS OR FORMER CLIENTS COME TO ME WITH, WITH PROBLEMS ON OVERPAYMENTS OR CESSATION, THE PROBLEM IS IT'S JUST SO DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO BE ABLE TO PAY, RIGHT, AND THERE IS NOTHING THAT SOCIAL SECURITY CAN WITHHOLD UNLESS WE [INAUDIBLE] A FEE PETITION. ANYWAY, SO IT'S JUST THIS BIG LONG PROCESS, IT'S VERY, VERY DIFFICULT. AND, AND MOST OF THE CLIENTS WE HAVE REPRESENTED OVER THE YEARS HAVE I THINK WE HAVE MENTIONED IN THIS QUESTION AS WELL, DON'T HAVE THE ABILITY TO COME UP WITH SOME TYPE OF REPAYMENT TO DO THIS. SO, WE HAVE GOT TO LOOK AT SOMETHING, OR OTHERWISE NOTHING WILL CHANGE AT LEAST ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR SIDE. AND I WOULD GUESS THAT YOU KNOW ON THE GOOD FOLKS HERE THAT ARE HELPING WITH LEGAL AID, YOU KNOW HELPING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND LOW-INCOME CLINICS, THEY PROBABLY DON'T HAVE A LOT OF BANDWIDTH TO BE ABLE TO HANDLE THESE TYPES OF CASES. IN FACT, I WOULD, I WOULD ASSUME THAT THERE IS VERY, VERY, VERY FEW THEY CAN TAKE.

REZ ISLAM: >> DANNY, JUST PIGGYBACKING OFF WHAT YOU ARE SAYING, I WOULD AGREE, THE BANDWIDTH JUST ISN'T THERE IN TERMS OF BEING ABLE TO PRIORITIZE THESE TYPES OF CASES. WE, WE TAKE THEM ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS WHEN THEY COME IN. YOU KNOW, IF WE'RE, IF WE'RE ABLE TO, DEPENDING ON --YOU KNOW, JUST DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND SOMETIMES DEPENDING ON IF THEY WERE A PRIOR CLIENT OF OURS AND WE'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE CASE, WE ARE ABLE TO BETTER ASSIST IN THOSE INSTANCES. BUT, YOU KNOW, IT IS JUST HARDER TO, TO ADVOCATE AT THESE TYPES OF CASES. ESPECIALLY WITH OVERPAYMENTS, A LOT OF TIMES WE GIVE GENERAL ADVICE YOU KNOW ABOUT HOW TO SEEK A WAIVER, ABOUT HOW TO ASK FOR THE, ASK THAT THEY LOWER THE AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT IS BEING TAKEN AT ONE TIME. SO, THERE IS, YOU KNOW, SOME ADVICE

THAT WE ARE ABLE TO GIVE, BUT YOU KNOW TO PROVIDE ACTUAL REPRESENTATION AT EACH OF THESE, IT IS HARD TO BE ABLE TO, HARD TO BE ABLE TO DO THAT BECAUSE OF RESOURCES.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> AND CAN I GO AHEAD AND PIGGYBACK OFF OF WHAT REZ SAYS?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> SURE, PLEASE LAURA.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> OKAY. SO PERHAPS ANOTHER SOLUTION SINCE LEGAL AID DOESN'T HAVE THAT BANDWIDTH IS TO CREATE SOME KIND OF MECHANISM WHICH WOULD ALLOW FOR EFFECTUATION, EFFECTUATION OF PAYMENT FOR A REFERRAL FEE. SO THAT IF LEGAL AID ISN'T ABLE TO TAKE THE CASE, THEY CAN REFER IT AND THEY WILL GET A PERCENTAGE OF THAT, PART OF THE FEE AS A REFERRAL FEE. AND THIS IS A LITTLE BIT OFF THE TOPIC, BUT I JUST WANTED TO MENTION THAT WITH CESSATION CASES, I REALLY THINK THOSE CASES NEED TO BE ON THE RECORD BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT. [INAUDIBLE] LIKE THEY, I HAVE BEEN, I WENT TO A HEARING, THE HEARING OFFICER WAS PRESENT. IT WAS NOT RECORDED, IT WASN'T VIDEOTAPED. THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL RECORDING OR ANY KIND OF A MEMORIALIZATION FOR WHAT HAPPENED, AND SO YOU KNOW THERE WAS NO WAY TO REBUT SOME OF THE ERRORS THAT WERE MADE THERE. AND I SAW THAT AS A BIG PROBLEM, ESPECIALLY WITH SSI CLAIMANTS THAT GO IN THERE UNREPRESENTED.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THAT IS A VERY INTERESTING POINT.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> BUT ALSO, I THINK THAT WITH PART OF WHAT DAN WAS SAYING ABOUT YOU KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS FOR SSI CLAIMANTS TO MAKE THESE KIND OF PAYMENTS, WITH THE, ALL OF THE ADJUSTMENTS THAT I DISCUSSED EARLIER, AND THE SSI RESTORATION ACT, I THINK THAT WOULD HELP BRING, INCREASE THE PAST DUE BENEFITS TO THEM AND THEIR MONTHLY PAYMENTS SO THAT THEY COULD, THEY ARE ABLE TO AFFORD TO PAY A, YOU KNOW, PERCENTAGE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> MANY PRIVATE ATTORNEYS WHO, WHO DO REPRESENT TERMINATION CASES AND CONTINUING DISABILITY REVIEW CASES, DO ASK THEIR CLIENTS TO PAY A PERCENTAGE OF THEIR MONTHLY BENEFIT ONGOING. IT IS NOT, BUT THIS POSTER WAS, WAS SUGGESTING WAS THAT SOCIAL SECURITY WITHHOLD THAT MONEY. WHAT MANY PEOPLE DO IS THAT THEY, THEY REQUEST IT AND SO THAT IS, I JUST WANTED TO CLARIFY, LAURA, WHAT YOU WERE SAYING THAT, SHOULD THEIR PAST DUE BENEFITS, SHOULD THEIR MONTHLY BENEFITS BE INCREASED UNDER SOME OF THE CHANGES PROPOSED IN THE SSI RESTORATION ACT, THAT THEY WOULD BE MORE ABLE TO PAY SOME OF THE, SOME OF THEIR MONTHLY BENEFIT TO THEIR ATTORNEY WHO THEN HOLDS IT IN ESCROW AND HAS TO SUBMIT A FEE PETITION? WHICH THE DELAYS CAUSED, THE DELAYS AT PROCESSING FEE PETITIONS ARE A WHOLE OTHER ISSUE IN, IN DISCOURAGING REPRESENTATIVES FROM TAKING ALMOST ANY CASE THAT INVOLVES A FEE PETITION.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> YES. THAT IS CORRECT. BECAUSE AS, JUST AS YOU STATED, WE STILL HAVE TO FILE FEE PETITIONS AND GET THEM APPROVED. SO, BUT AT LEAST THIS WOULD BE MORE OF AN INCENTIVE, AND WOULD CREATE A BIGGER POSSIBILITY FOR THEM TO BE ABLE TO EASE THE BURDEN OF PAYING ON SUCH LITTLE INCOME AS IT STANDS.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> RIGHT. BEFORE WE MOVE ON, DID ANYONE ELSE WANT TO COMMENT ON CDRs?

NICOLE DOOLEY: >> I JUST WANTED TO MENTION, THIS IS NICOLE, THAT ONE OTHER ISSUE I BELIEVE I PERSONALLY HAVE SEEN IS PEOPLE, I THINK I TOUCHED UPON THIS EARLIER OF, IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH US BEING ABLE TO REPRESENT PEOPLE IN THE FIRST PLACE. BUT SOMETIMES PEOPLE CALL US AFTER THEIR BENEFITS HAVE ALREADY STOPPED. THEY ARE LIKE, MY BENEFITS STOPPED SIX MONTHS AGO, I DON'T KNOW WHY. AND WE DISCOVER THAT IT WAS BECAUSE THERE WAS A CDR. SO I THINK, AND THEY JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE NOTICES THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN LEADING UP TO THAT POINT. SO, I THINK THERE'S ANOTHER AREA WHERE HAVING TO CLEAR OUR NOTICES COULD HELP CLAIMANTS REACH OUT TO US AT A MUCH EARLIER POINT AND SO WE CAN STEP IN EARLIER AND BE ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> EXCELLENT POINT.

DORIS CORTES: >> YEAH, AND JUST TO ADD ON TO WHAT NICOLE IS SAYING, ON TOP OF THE CONFUSING NOTICES FOR CDRs OR REDETERMINATION, IS THAT THERE IS TEN DAYS TO ASK FOR BENEFITS TO BE CONTINUED. AT THE SAME, IN THE SAME NOTICE IT IS TELLING YOU, YOU HAVE 60 DAYS TO APPEAL, SO THAT IS VERY CONFUSING. AND I THINK ELIMINATING THAT TEN DAYS TO ASK FOR BENEFITS TO BE CONTINUED WOULD BE MOST BENEFICIAL, AND STILL HAVE, BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE BENEFITS WITHIN THE TIMEFRAME TO FILE THE 60 DAY APPEAL.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> I THINK THAT TEN DAY NOTICE IS ACTUALLY AN ISSUE THAT, THAT WE DISCUSSED BEFORE, IS PARTICULARLY FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH AND MAY HAVE TROUBLE FINDING SOMEBODY WHO CAN TRANSLATE THE NOTICE FOR THEM IN THAT VERY LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> SO, GOING TO MOVE ON TO ANOTHER, ANOTHER QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE. AND THIS IS ONE THAT IF IT HASN'T AFFECTED YOU YET, I AM SURE IT WILL SOON. SO, THE QUESTION IS, ARE THE PANELISTS SEEING ANY ISSUES WITH SOME CLAIMANTS HAVING DIFFICULTY UTILIZING THE VIDEO HEARINGS, EITHER UNDERSTANDING THE TECHNOLOGY TO SET IT UP, OR PRESENTING THE CASE, EXAMINING THE CLAIMANT, THE VE, THE ME, ET CETERA? SO, IF ANY OF YOU HAVE HAD THE MICROSOFT TEAMS VIDEO HEARINGS THAT SOCIAL SECURITY IMPLEMENTED EARLIER THIS YEAR, AND, AND WANT TO DISCUSS SOME OF THOSE ISSUES.

DORIS CORTES: >> I HAVE HAD A FEW HEARINGS, AND MOST INTERESTING ACTUALLY, THE BIGGEST DIFFICULTY SEEMS TO BE ON THE SOCIAL SECURITY SIDE WITH THE ABILITY FOR THEM TO HAVE THE VOCATIONAL EXPERTS ON THE PHONE AND INTERPRETER AND THE CLAIMANT AND WHAT NOT. SO, ALTHOUGH SOME CLAIMANTS HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH THE TECHNOLOGY, ONCE I MYSELF PRACTICED WITH THE CLAIMANT AHEAD OF TIME SO THAT THEY ARE PREPARED AND MAKE SURE THEY HAVE THE APP OR THE CAPABILITY TO HAVE THE APP, I'VE BEEN FINDING THAT THE DIFFICULTY HAS BEEN ON THE SOCIAL SECURITY SIDE WHERE I HAVE HAD HEARINGS THAT HAVE, TEAMS HEARINGS THAT HAVE TURNED INTO A PHONE HEARING BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T GET THE VE ONLINE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> LAURA, WERE YOU ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING? I AM NOT SURE.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> I WAS JUST GOING TO AGREE. I MEAN, I SEE THE SAME THINGS HAPPEN WHERE VIDEO HEARINGS HAVE TURNED INTO PHONE HEARINGS. I'VE ONLY HAD A HANDFUL OF VIDEO HEARINGS THIS YEAR. AND THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A PROBLEM ON SOCIAL SECURITY'S SIDE. I'M SAYING THIS DESPITE MY TECHNICAL ISSUES THIS MORNING. BUT AS FAR AS ME BEING ABLE TO SEE THE

JUDGE AND YOU KNOW THE CLAIMANT, THERE HAS BEEN NO PROBLEM THERE. IT IS JUST, IT IS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE WAY THAT THE HEARING IS BEING RECORDED BY THE COURT REPORTER OR CONNECTING AN EXPERT WITNESS.

DAN BOTT: >> I WANTED TO JUMP IN ON THIS ONE TOO REALLY QUICK. WE HAVE SEEN A FEW PROBLEMS LIKE ON THE CLAIMANT SIDE, BUT, BUT I THINK WE SHOULD JUST CONTINUE TO TRY TO WORK THROUGH THOSE. I HAVE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE WE HAVE SWITCHED TO NON-INPERSON HEARINGS AND I WAS REALLY, REALLY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THAT WAS GOING TO DO AT THE APPROVAL RATE. BUT I CAN TELL YOU LOOKING AT NUMBERS FROM A 35,000-FOOT LEVEL, AS FAR AS APPROVAL RATES AT THE HEARING LEVEL I CANNOT SEE THAT A PANDEMIC HAS HAPPENED. NOW, BEFORE I WOULD NEVER HAVE GUESSED THAT THAT'S WHAT MY DATA WOULD SHOW. BEFORE, BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, NATIONAL HEARING CENTERS HAD A SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER APPROVAL RATE THAN DOING HEARINGS IN PERSON. I CAN SHOW VERY, VERY CLEARLY WHEN JUDGES GO TO THOSE, THEIR APPROVAL RATES DROPPED, I'VE BEEN ABLE TO TRACK IT VERY, VERY CLOSELY. BUT SINCE THE PANDEMIC HAS BEGUN, THE APPROVAL RATES, AGAIN FROM THE 35,000 FOOT LEVEL, HAVE NOT CHANGED. AND, AND I THINK THAT THERE IS SOME EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES THAT SOCIAL SECURITY CAN LOOK AT HERE AND EVERYBODY ELSE ON HOW TO BE EFFICIENT AND HOW WE DO THESE THINGS. THERE IS AN INCENTIVE FOR THE CLAIMANTS AND THE ATTORNEYS TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO WORK WITH SOCIAL SECURITY ON THIS WITH, WITH USING TECHNOLOGY AND DOING VIDEO HEARINGS, BECAUSE IT, IT IS VERY, VERY DIFFICULT FOR MANY OF OUR CLIENTS TO FIND A WAY TO GET TO THE HEARING. WE ARE ALWAYS DEALING WITH PEOPLE THAT CAN'T GET A TAXI, CAN'T GET A BUS, CAN'T GET AN UBER, NOBODY CAN TAKE THEM THERE. THOSE PROBLEMS WERE RAMPANT EVERY SINGLE DAY BEFORE THE PANDEMIC HAPPENED, AND HAVING VIDEO HEARINGS, PHONE HEARINGS AS WELL, HAS GREATLY HELPED WITH THAT. AND AS LONG AS I CAN SEE THAT MY CLIENTS ARE NOT DISADVANTAGED FROM A STATISTICAL STANDPOINT, FROM DOING A HEARING, THROUGH SOME MEANS OF TECHNOLOGY INSTEAD OF BEING IN PERSON, I HAVE NO PROBLEM PLAYING BALL AND DOING THOSE WITH SOCIAL SECURITY. IN FACT, IT IS VERY EXCITING, BECAUSE IT ALSO SAVES ME A LOT OF MONEY ON TRAVEL EXPENSES AND TIME AWAY FROM THE OFFICE. I CAN REPRESENT MORE CLIENTS IF I CAN DO IT RIGHT HERE AT THIS DESK THAN IF I AM RUNNING BACK AND FORTH TO MY LOCAL HEARING OFFICE OR YOU KNOW THE NEXT ONE OR TWO OVER. SO, BUT LET'S FIGURE OUT A WAY TO MAKE THEM WORK. BECAUSE THERE ARE SOME REALLY POSITIVE THINGS, EVEN THOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SOME, SOME TECHNOLOGICAL ISSUES.

REZ ISLAM: >> NOW, DAN, I WOULD AGREE THAT THERE IS DEFINITELY A BENEFIT TO THE CLIENTS THAT CAN'T ACCESS THE SERVICES, CAN'T ACCESS THE OFFICES EFFECTIVELY, BUT I STILL THINK IN-PERSON HEARINGS ARE PROBABLY, ARE THE GOLD STANDARD IN TERMS OF THE, YOU KNOW, DUE PROCESS RIGHTS THAT ARE GIVEN TO OUR CLIENTS AND THAT ARE RECOGNIZED. AND THE BENEFITS THAT THE CLIENTS HAVE AT IN-PERSON HEARINGS I THINK ARE GREAT AND SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED AND SHOULDN'T EVER BE SOMETHING THAT IS YOU KNOW MOVED AWAY FROM FULLY. YOU KNOW, I THINK IN THOSE INSTANCES WHERE IT IS MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR A CLIENT TO DO IT REMOTELY, I THINK WE SHOULD, YOU KNOW, ENCOURAGE THOSE TYPES OF -- THOSE TYPES OF OPTIONS TO EXIST. YOU KNOW, I WOULD ALSO SAY THAT FROM THE NUMBERS THAT YOU MIGHT BE DESCRIBING, I HAVEN'T LOOKED AT NUMBERS IN THAT AREA THAT SPECIFICALLY AND YOU PROBABLY HAVE A LOT MORE NUMBERS TO LOOK AT THEN ME. BUT I'M JUST WONDERING, GENERALLY I FOUND THAT THE MORE, THE CASES THAT WERE MORE READY TO GO WERE THE ONES THAT WERE BEING HEARD AT HEARINGS, YOU KNOW, THE

ONES THAT PEOPLE ARE [INAUDIBLE] THE ONES THAT WERE BETTER. AND NOT BETTER NECESSARILY, BUT MORE ABLE TO BE ADJUDICATED SOONER. SO, WE STILL HAVE CLIENTS THAT ARE ALSO WAITING FOR IN-PERSON HEARINGS THAT HAVE NOT SINCE MARCH 2020 HAVE NOT, HAVE NOT DECIDED TO HAVE A VIRTUAL HEARING. SO, YOU KNOW, I DON'T THINK IT IS A COMPLETE PICTURE OF WHAT THE HEARINGS WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE OVER THE LAST YEAR. IT IS, I THINK IT IS A SNAPSHOT OF PEOPLE THAT ARE EITHER UNREPRESENTED AND UNWILLING OR JUST UNWILLING TO WAIT OR JUST STRONGER CASES. YOU KNOW, SO I THINK IT IS NOT ALL THE CASES THAT AS REPRESENTATIVES WE WOULD BE TAKING, TAKING TO HEARING. YOU KNOW, BUT I DO THINK, BUT I DO AGREE THAT THERE IS DEFINITELY SOME BENEFITS TO REMOTE HEARINGS, AND IT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU KNOW CAN HELP, CAN HELP A FEW, SOME OF OUR CLIENTS. AND, YOU KNOW, WE FIND THAT WHENEVER WE CAN, IF A CLIENT IS HAVING A LOT, WE TRY TO DO THE SAME PREP THAT DORIS WAS DESCRIBING AND LAURA WAS DESCRIBING. IF A CLIENT REALLY IS SO UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE, WE TRY TO FACILITATE MEETING IN OUR OFFICE IF POSSIBLE. YOU KNOW, BUT THEN HAVING THAT BECOME A LONG-TERM SOLUTION IS ALSO HARD ONLY BECAUSE ESPECIALLY, I MEAN, NOW WITH COVID, BUT EVEN LONG-TERM, OUR WAITING ROOMS IN OUR OFFICES CAN BECOME, START LOOKING LIKE HEARING OFFICE WAITING ROOMS WITH THE DELAYS THAT ARE GOING, THAT EXIST IN HAVING A HEARING. LIKE EVEN WITH THESE REMOTE HEARINGS, A 10:00 A.M. HEARING MIGHT NOT HAPPEN UNTIL NOON. AND WE ARE JUST WAITING BY THE PHONE. SO, YOU KNOW THERE'S A LOT OF COMPLICATIONS. I THINK YOU ARE RIGHT, DAN, THOUGH THAT WE NEED TO TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK. BECAUSE THERE ARE SOME, THERE ARE SOME BENEFITS TO IT FOR SOME OF MY CLIENTS. BUT I AM A STRONG ADVOCATE OF IN-PERSON SERVICES.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> I'D LIKE TO JUMP IN THERE TOO. I AGREE WITH REZ AND DAN, THERE ARE DEFINITELY SOME BENEFITS TO THE VIDEO HEARINGS, BUT I THINK THE VIDEO HEARINGS AND TELEPHONIC HEARINGS, WE ALL KNOW ARE PRETTY IMPERSONAL. AND IT'S NOT JUST IMPERSONAL FOR THE CLAIMANTS, IT'S IMPERSONAL FOR THE ATTORNEYS. ON TOP OF IT, WE ARE GETTING A LOT OF ALJs FROM DIFFERENT STATES THAT DON'T KNOW US, DON'T KNOW OUR PRACTICE, DON'T KNOW OUR REPUTATION. AND I THINK IT REALLY HELPS TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL ALJs AND THE ALJs KNOW THE LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES AS WELL. AND THE IN-PERSON HEARING REALLY BRINGS THAT HOME.

REZ ISLAM: >> YEAH, AND LOCAL JUDGES JUST KNOW THE AREA. YOU KNOW, LIKE ONE TIME WE HAD A CLIENT WHO MISTAKENLY, THEY LIVED IN THE TOWN OVER FROM THE HEARING OFFICE, AND THEY MISTAKENLY WENT TO ANOTHER CENTER ABOUT, WHERE THERE WERE A LOT OF COURTS. THEY MISTAKENLY WENT TO SOMETHING LIKE 50 OR 60-MILES AWAY BY ACCIDENT, BECAUSE THEY JUST DIDN'T REALIZE WHERE THE HEARING WAS AND THEY JUST DID WHAT THEY KNEW. AND YOU KNOW TRYING TO GET, THAT CASE WAS ABOUT TO BE DISMISSED, IF WE WEREN'T THERE. BUT WE WERE ABLE TO GET IT WITH A GOOD CAUSE SHOWING ABOUT THE MISTAKE HE MADE BECAUSE OF HIS DISABILITIES, AND THE BUS SCHEDULES, AND HOW HARD IT WOULD BE FOR HIM TO GET BACK TO OUR HEARING TIMELY LIKE, AND THAT WAS ALL WITH A HEARING, WITH A JUDGE THAT WAS REMOTE. WHEREAS A JUDGE FROM OUR AREA WOULD KNOW THAT SOMEONE CAN'T GET FROM ONE TOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF LONG ISLAND FROM ANOTHER TOWN THAT'S ALL THE WAY ON THE EAST END. YOU KNOW, THAT IS JUST GOING TO BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH PUBLIC, WITH THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS IN OUR AREA. SO, YOU KNOW, I THINK THERE IS DEFINITELY A STRONG BENEFIT TO IN-PERSON HEARINGS, LOCAL JUDGES AS LAURA SAID.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> AND ALSO, OUR LOCAL JUDGES ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE COUNTY INDIGENT HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS HERE, HOW THEY WORK, WHAT THEIR WAITING TIMES ARE, SO AN ALJ FROM A DIFFERENT STATE MIGHT SAY, WELL, WHY DID THEY WAIT SO LONG FOR THIS APPOINTMENT TO GET SET? WELL, IT IS A STANDARD OPERATION AT THAT INDIGENT HEALTH CARE CLINIC OR HOSPITAL. A LOCAL ALJ IS MORE QUICK TO KNOW THAT.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> SO, I'LL JUST ADD TO THAT, SOME OF WHAT I HAVE HEARD FROM OUR NOSSCR MEMBERS WHO ARE REPRESENTATIVES FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY, MANY SAY THAT JUST AS YOU HAVE SAID, THAT A VIDEO HEARING IS GOOD FOR SOME PEOPLE, THE RIGHT TO AN IN-PERSON HEARING MUST ALWAYS EXIST. THE ALJs KNOW THE MEDICAL PROFESSIONS, KNOW THE BUS SCHEDULES BETTER WHEN THEY ARE LOCAL. AS FAR AS TECHNOLOGY IS CONCERNED, MANY HAVE FOUND THAT IF THEY, IF THEY BRING THE CLIENT IN TO THEIR OWN OFFICE AND SET THEM UP IN THEIR OFFICE, THEY ARE ABLE TO NAVIGATE THE HEARING BETTER THAN IF THEY ARE ON THEIR OWN. AND THAT OFTEN PEOPLE HAVE TO BE IN THE LIBRARY, OR SOME OTHER, NOT VERY PRIVATE LOCATION TO CONDUCT THEIR HEARING, AND A HOMELESS SHELTER OR SOMETHING. THAT IS, THAT IS REALLY NOT IDEAL FOR A VIDEO HEARING. SO AGAIN, WHILE IT IS, WHILE IT IS GREAT FOR SOME PEOPLE, IT IS NOT GREAT FOR EVERYBODY. AND SO KEEPING IT AS ONE OF THE OPTIONS ALONG WITH IN-PERSON HEARINGS, HAS BEEN HIGHLY RECOMMENDED. SO WHY DON'T WE, WHY DON'T WE MOVE ON. ANOTHER QUESTION THAT HAS COME IN IS, BEYOND NOTICES WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE AN EFFECTIVE MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL SECURITY TO ADVERTISE THE AVAILABILITY OF REPRESENTATIVE SERVICES IF A CLAIMANT OR POTENTIAL CLAIMANT WANTS TO PURSUE THEM? SO RIGHT NOW, SOCIAL SECURITY IS REQUIRED TO SEND A NOTICE WITH THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT, ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE HEARING REQUEST IDENTIFYING LOCAL LEGAL SERVICES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND IDENTIFYING REFERRAL SERVICES FOR BAR ASSOCIATIONS, FOR PRIVATE ATTORNEYS. BUT THIS, THIS POSTER IS ASKING, BEYOND NOTICES. AND I WOULD SAY ONE THING, IS TO PUT THOSE NOTICES AS SOON AS YOU FILE AN INITIAL APPLICATION, BUT EVEN, EVEN BEFORE THAT, HOW CAN SOCIAL SECURITY LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE PROGRAMS THAT EXIST TO EVEN, TO EVEN LET A PERSON KNOW TO APPLY? THEY MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT A SURVIVOR'S BENEFIT OR A DEPENDENT'S BENEFIT.

JACKIE DAI: >> SO, THIS IS JACKIE. BACK WHEN, BEFORE, PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC, I KNOW THERE IS BROCHURES AND ITEMS WITHIN THE DISTRICT OFFICES, THAT MAYBE A WORKAROUND COULD BE POSTING IT OUTSIDE RIGHT NOW OF THE LOCAL DISTRICT OFFICES, THAT COULD BE A QUICK WORKAROUND FOR PEOPLE THAT ARE STILL LIVING AND WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY. THEY WILL SEE IT. MAYBE THEIR FRIENDS WILL SEE IT, AND THEN WORD OF MOUTH WILL SPREAD IN TERMS OF THAT.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THAT SEEMS LIKE A VERY SIMPLE GOOD IDEA, JUST MOVE SOMETHING FROM INSIDE FROM THE LOCKED DOORS AND PUT THEM OUTSIDE IN CASE PEOPLE ARE STILL YOU KNOW GOING BY THE OFFICES, MAYBE THINKING THAT THEY ARE OPEN, AT LEAST CAN GET THAT INFORMATION.

NICOLE DOOLEY: >> I ALSO, I BELIEVE THE CURRENT INDICES ARE PLACED AT THE END OF A LONG PACKET THAT PEOPLE RECEIVE. PERHAPS IT COULD BE MOVED TO THE TOP, SO THAT IT IS THE FIRST THING THAT PEOPLE SEE WHEN THEY OPEN IT. I KNOW, I ASSUME WE HAVE MANY PEOPLE WHO LIKE READ THE FIRST FEW AND THEN YOU KNOW THEY JUST, ONCE YOU GET TO THE END OF A LONG PACKET, IT IS VERY HARD TO KEEP PAYING ATTENTION AND KNOW WHAT'S BACK THERE. AND THEN A LOT OF PEOPLE CALL SOCIAL SECURITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THEY GET. SO MAYBE IT

COULD BE ADDED ON AS MAYBE A SCRIPT THAT PEOPLE CAN, THAT SOCIAL SECURITY EMPLOYEES COULD SAY AT THE END OF A PHONE CALL, THERE ARE ALSO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES YOU COULD HAVE ACCESS TO AND THEN LIST THOSE OFF FOR PEOPLE WHO CALL.

REZ ISLAM: >> YES. AND VERY, SORRY JACKIE, GO AHEAD.

JACKIE DAI: >> OH, NO, I WAS JUST GOING TO SAY, INSTEAD OF THE WAITING MUSIC, THE RECORDED MESSAGE COULD BE THERE, WHILE YOU ARE WAITING TO TALK TO A REPRESENTATIVE.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> GREAT IDEA. KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.

REZ ISLAM: >> I THINK WE'VE ALSO -- I THINK WE WERE DISCUSSING THAT WE ALSO HEARD SOME REPORTS DURING THE PANDEMIC OF CLIENTS, YOU KNOW, CALLING IN AND SAYING THAT THEY WERE TOLD THEY DON'T NEED TO HAVE AN ATTORNEY AT CERTAIN LEVELS. WHEREAS I THINK MAKING IT CLEAR THAT ATTORNEYS ARE VALUABLE OR AVAILABLE AT ALL LEVELS, AND CAN ASSIST IN HELPING THROUGH THE PROCESS, YOU KNOW, AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO SEEK OUT THAT ASSISTANCE, YOU KNOW, AS JACKIE SAID, MAYBE DURING THE HEARING, DURING THE WAIT MESSAGE, YOU KNOW. I THINK THAT MAKING SURE THAT, YOU KNOW, SOCIAL SECURITY -- THAT, YOU KNOW, WHILE EVERYONE IS WORKING REMOTELY AND ONCE THEY'RE IN THE OFFICE, THAT IT'S MADE CLEAR THAT REPRESENTATION IS AVAILABLE AND CAN ASSIST AND CAN HELP MOVE THE THING ALONG FASTER, MAKE THE WHOLE PROCESS MOVE ALONG MORE SMOOTHLY.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> WE HEAR MANY TIMES FROM CALLERS TO OUR REFERRAL SERVICE THAT THEY'VE BEEN TOLD FROM SOMEBODY AT SOCIAL SECURITY THAT THEY EITHER DON'T NEED AN ATTORNEY OR SHOULDN'T HIRE AN ATTORNEY. AND I THINK THAT TYPE OF RETRAINING, AS YOU MENTIONED, IS IMPORTANT. SO, LET'S MOVE ON. THIS MORNING THERE WAS SOME DISCUSSION ABOUT CLAIMANTS WHO FACE BARRIERS DUE TO THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES AND CIRCUMSTANCES, AND SOME OF THOSE EXAMPLES WERE JUST SOME LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE RELUCTANT TO GO TO THE DOCTOR FOR FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION AT THE -- BY THEIR MEDICAL PROVIDERS, OR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHO ALSO ARE RELUCTANT TO GO TO A MEDICAL PROVIDER OR TO AN ATTORNEY FOR FEAR OF RETRIBUTION FROM THEIR ABUSER. SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE JUST, DUE TO THEIR RACE OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY'RE JUST CONSTANTLY BEING BULLIED OR BEAT DOWN, AND SO THOSE WERE SOME OF THE TYPE OF LIFE EXPERIENCES THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT THIS MORNING. AND SO, THE QUESTION IS, WHAT ACTION DO YOU AS REPRESENTATIVES TAKE TO ASSIST THESE CLAIMANTS? AND THEN THE POSTER GOES ON, PERHAPS SOCIAL SECURITY CAN LEARN FROM THESE ACTIONS.

JACKIE DAI: >> SO, THIS IS JACKIE. IN TERMS OF LGBTQ, I'VE RECENTLY BEEN EXPANDING IN TERMS OF OUTREACH WITHIN LA COUNTY TO PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY LGBTQ. AND SOME ACTIONS THAT I'VE TAKEN ARE CONNECTING WITH TRUSTED COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE LGBT CENTER IN LOS ANGELES, THE AIDS PROJECT OF LOS ANGELES, OUTREACH COORDINATORS. AND I DO A SELF-INTRODUCTION, LIKE A MEET AND GREET FIRST, WITH THAT PARTICULAR COMMUNITY-BASED GROUP, AND THEN WE TALK ABOUT WHAT JOINT EFFORTS WE MIGHT HAVE FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH. AND I REALLY LISTEN TO WHAT THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS ARE, LIKE WHAT ARE THE HEALTH LAW TOPICS THAT YOU NEED ASSISTANCE WITH? WHAT ARE THE HEALTH CARE ISSUES? AND SO, I THINK THAT MAYBE SOMETHING THAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THAT IS TO LOOK WITHIN THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION AND THE UNITS THAT ARE AVAILABLE AND THE DIVISIONS THAT ARE AVAILABLE,

WHAT KIND OF EXISTING RESOURCES YOU ALREADY HAVE WITHIN AND CONNECTIONS WITHIN, AND ASKING WITHIN YOUR TEAM WHETHER OR NOT THERE ARE PEOPLE WITH EXISTING CONNECTIONS TO THOSE TYPES OF COMMUNITY-BASED GROUPS. AND I THINK THAT MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT IS USUALLY A GOOD STARTING POINT BECAUSE YOU DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING. YOU'RE GOING IN AS, OKAY, I'M AN OUTSIDER, I WORK AT, YOU KNOW, NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY. CAN I LEARN FROM YOUR GROUP? TELL ME WHAT IT IS THAT YOUR GROUP NEEDS WITH REGARDS TO SSI SSDI, AND HOW CAN I MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE PROCESS? SO, IT'S INTERACTIVE. IT'S A SAFE SPOT. MAYBE EVEN DOING ANONYMOUS SURVEYS SO THAT PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE GOING IN PRIOR TO THE MEETING WITH THEM.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THAT'S VERY GOOD. THAT'S VERY USEFUL. DID ANYONE ELSE WANT TO ADD IN?

REZ ISLAM: >> YES. I MEAN, AS A CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDER, WE ALSO TRY TO DO A HOLISTIC APPROACH. WE HAVE A LOT OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT WE WORK WITH THAT WE TRY TO, WHEN WE IDENTIFY ISSUES, WE DON'T JUST, YOU KNOW, COMPARTMENTALIZE THEM IN ANY WAY OR TRY TO IGNORE IT. WE TRY TO ADDRESS IT. WE LET THE CLIENTS KNOW ABOUT RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE THAT MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP THEM WITH WHATEVER OTHER ISSUES THEY MIGHT BE FACING, WHETHER IT'S SOMETHING, A HEALTH CARE RELATED ISSUE, A DV RELATED ISSUE, OR SOMETHING ELSE THAT'S AFFECTING THEIR LIFE. BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY PURSUE A DISABILITY CLAIM IF THEY'RE WORRIED FOR THEIR SAFETY OR WORRIED FOR WHERE THEY'RE GOING TO -- WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO EAT THAT NIGHT OR WHERE THEY'RE GOING TO LIVE. SO, WE DO TRY OUR BEST TO TRY TO ADDRESS THOSE ISSUES BY CONNECTING THEM TO THOSE RESOURCES OR TRYING TO, IF WE'RE ABLE TO HANDLE ONE OF THOSE SITUATIONS IN ONE OF OUR OTHER UNITS THAT MIGHT BE ABLE TO ADDRESS THE LEGAL ISSUE. YOU KNOW, I THINK, YOU KNOW, DIFFERENT -- SOCIAL SECURITY IS A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION. THEY WORK IN SO MANY DIFFERENT PLACES OBVIOUSLY. AND SOME STATES AND DIFFERENT REGIONS HAVE DIFFERENT RESOURCES THAT ARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE. SO, IT MIGHT BE BEST TO TREAT IT, AS JACKIE SAYS, MEANING LA, AND A REGIONAL APPROACH OF HOW TO CONNECT WITH THE ORGANIZATIONS THERE. MAKING IT SO THAT THE DISTRICT OFFICES ARE MORE -- IT'S A LOT EASIER FOR US TO INTERACT WITH THEM, RATHER THAN TRYING TO, YOU KNOW, ESPECIALLY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC, YOU KNOW, IT'S BEEN HARD TO GET THEM ON THE PHONE. I THINK I'M, YOU KNOW, I'M A STRONG PROPONENT OF IN-PERSON SERVICES AND I'VE BEEN SAYING THIS THROUGHOUT, BUT I DO WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT SOCIAL SECURITY HAS BEEN DOING ALL THROUGH THE PANDEMIC. YOU KNOW, I THINK THEY WERE ONE -- THERE WAS ONE AREA OF LAW THAT THEY DID VERY WELL IN TRYING TO KEEP IT MOVING. AS DAN POINTED OUT, THERE WAS NO DROP OFF IN NUMBERS, YOU KNOW, IN APPROVED CASES, YOU KNOW. WE -- OUR SOCIAL SECURITY PRACTICE NEVER REALLY SLOWED DOWN. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT KEPT GOING. SO, THEY DID A GREAT JOB OF STAYING OPEN IN A WAY. BUT NOW WITH EVERYTHING ELSE REOPENING, THEY JUST NEED TO, YOU KNOW, CLOSE THE LOOP, AND PROVIDE THOSE IN-SERVICES, ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHER HYBRID SERVICES THEY'VE BEEN PROVIDING, YOU KNOW, AND TRYING TO MAKE IT SO THAT IT'S MORE OF A PARTNERSHIP THE WAY JACKIE SUGGESTED. I THINK THAT WOULD BE GREAT. IF WE HAD AN EASY WAY TO INTERACT WITH OUR LOCAL OFFICES, YOU KNOW. AT OUR HEARING OFFICES, I THINK THEY'LL PROBABLY AGREE, THERE'S PEOPLE AT THE HEARING OFFICES THAT WE ARE ABLE TO CONNECT WITH, THAT WE'RE ABLE TO TALK TO. WHEN WE IDENTIFY AN ISSUE IN A CASE, WE'RE ABLE TO GET IT EXHIBITED QUICKLY OR WE ASK FOR SOME SORT OF ASSISTANCE IN

GETTING A SUBPOENA OUT OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. HAVING A SAME OR SIMILAR RELATIONSHIP WITH DISTRICT OFFICES WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL TO TRY TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE MORE SIMPLE ISSUES THAT WON'T NEED TO GO TO HEARING.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU. THANK YOU. DID ANYONE ELSE WANT TO ADD ANYTHING TO THIS QUESTION?

NICOLE DOOLEY: >> I THINK ONE GROUP THAT I MEANT TO MENTION EARLIER THAT HAS PARTICULAR BARRIERS ARE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. IT'S ONE GROUP WHERE A LOT OF THE STRATEGIES THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN DESCRIBED ARE REALLY IMPORTANT. MEETING THEM WHERE THEY ARE AND MAKING SURE THAT YOU REACH OUT USING MULTIPLE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION. MAIL IS OFTEN DELAYED TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE -- WHOSE ADDRESS IS CHANGING. THEY CHANGE THEIR PHONE NUMBERS FREQUENTLY. SO, YOU JUST HAVE TO MAKE SURE TO TRY MULTIPLE WAYS TO REACH OUT TO THEM AND JUST BE OPEN IN TERMS OF HOW YOU MEET WITH THEM. THEY MAY HAVE TO COME INTO THE OFFICE. YOU MAY HAVE TO MEET THEM SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE COMMUNITY. SO, MAKING SURE, IN PARTICULAR, COMMUNITIES LIKE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE -- THERE'S FLEXIBILITY IN TERMS OF HOW YOU WORK WITH THEM AND REACH OUT TO THEM.

DORIS CORTES: >> AND VERY QUICKLY, SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS BELIEVING IN CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST IN THE ORGANIZATION, NOTING THAT THEY CAN -- EVERYTHING THAT'S BEING TOLD TO THEM IS GOING TO BE, YOU KNOW, LEFT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION; THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN ACCESS IT BY CALLING AND ASKING FOR INFORMATION. AND I'VE BEEN A BIG PROPONENT OF ELIMINATING SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER OFF MANY OF THE NOTICES GOING OUT. OUR CLAIMANTS ARE -- A LOT OF CLAIMANTS TEND TO MOVE A LOT, MOVE AROUND, OR, YOU KNOW, DELAYS IN MAIL. AND SO OFTEN THERE'S A LOT OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION. AND SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER IS ONE OF THE MOST VITAL INFORMATION THAT SHOULD BE ELIMINATED FROM NOTICES. PEOPLE DO KNOW THEIR OWN NUMBER, SO THAT'S ANOTHER THING.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> EXCELLENT POINT. BEFORE WE GO TO THE NEXT QUESTION, I JUST WANT TO REMIND THE AUDIENCE THAT IF YOU WANT TO SUBMIT A QUESTION, TO SEND IT TO NATIONALDISABILITYFORUM -- ALL ONE WORD -- NATIONALDISABILITYFORUM@SSA.GOV. SO, ANOTHER QUESTION WE HAVE IS ABOUT RURAL AREAS. THE QUESTION IS, IN RURAL AREAS, THERE ARE LIMITED PROVIDERS. MANY OF THE PROVIDERS ARE NOT WILLING TO SAY THAT AN INDIVIDUAL IS DISABLED; RATHER, THEY WANT TO WORK WITH THE POSITIVE. WHAT SUGGESTIONS DOES ANYONE HAVE TO GET PROVIDERS TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF HELPING IN THESE CASES? I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S EVEN NECESSARILY ONLY LIMITED TO RURAL PROVIDERS. I THINK MANY DOCTORS ALWAYS WANT TO FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE WHEN THEY WRITE THE PATIENT HAS IMPROVED. BUT HOW -- SO I WOULD EXPAND THIS QUESTION TO ANY PROVIDERS. WHAT SUGGESTIONS DOES ANYONE HAVE TO GET PROVIDERS TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSING THEIR PATIENT'S CONDITION IN TERMS THAT SOCIAL SECURITY WILL UNDERSTAND AFFECT THEIR ABILITY TO WORK?

DORIS CORTES: >> I THINK OBVIOUSLY WE'RE LIKE KIND OF ON THE DIFFERENT SIDES OF DOCTORS, BECAUSE THEIR JOB IS TO HEAL AND TO MAKE THIS PERSON BETTER AND RETURN TO WORK. SO THAT'S OBVIOUSLY THEIR POINT OF VIEW. I THINK OUR APPROACH IN OUR ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN GOING OUT TO THESE CLINICS AND HAVING MEETINGS WITH THESE DOCTORS IN BIG SETTINGS AND EXPLAINING WHAT THE PROCESS IS, WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR, WHAT SOCIAL SECURITY IS LOOKING FOR, IN TERMS OF LIMITATIONS. AND THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKERS'

COMPENSATION, IT'S NOT ABOUT PERCENTAGE, BUT MORE HOLISTICALLY ABOUT THE PERSON, AND THAT THERE'S MANY AREAS THAT AN INDIVIDUAL CAN BE FOUND DISABLED. WE EXPLAIN, YOU KNOW, THE LEVELS OF APPEALS AND WHAT IT REQUIRES FROM A DOCTOR. SO, WE'VE NOTICED SOMETIMES WE HAVE BIG ISSUES WITH DOCTORS FILLING OUT MEDICAL SOURCE STATEMENTS. SO, WE'VE IMPLEMENTED IT AND ASKED DOCTORS TO PUT IT MORE IN THEIR NOTES ABOUT, YOU KNOW, WHAT THEY FIND IN THEIR EXAMINATION AND IF THEY HAVE ANY LIMITATIONS OF RANGE OF MOTION, ANY, YOU KNOW, PAIN OR WHATNOT, TO PUT IT IN -- AND WRITE IT IN THE NOTES SO IT'S SOMETHING THAT WE CAN TAKE FROM THAT TO HELP WITH THEIR APPEAL.

LAURA SIGAUD: >> SOMETHING THAT I DO A LOT IS WHEN I AM NOTIFIED THAT A DOCTOR HAS REFUSED TO COMPLETE A MEDICAL SOURCE STATEMENT IS I HAVE -- I WRITE THEM DIRECTLY. AND I HAVE SORT OF THIS STOCK LANGUAGE THAT I USE EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RAW MEDICAL DATA AND THEN EXTRAPOLATING LIMITING EFFECTS OF THOSE CONDITIONS. I EXPLAIN WE'RE LAYMEN IN MEDICAL MATTERS. THE JUDGE IS A LAYMAN IN MEDICAL MATTERS. WE NEED A PHYSICIAN OR A PH.D. OR AN ACCEPTABLE MEDICAL SOURCE. I EXPLAIN WHAT THAT IS. AND THEN I GO BACK IN AND EDIT AND, YOU KNOW, SAY, FOR EXAMPLE, "IN THIS NOTE, YOU SAID." IT CAN BE A LABORIOUS ENTERPRISE SOMETIMES. BUT IT DOESN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE. IF YOU HAVE A LETTER THAT'S PREPARED, KIND OF EXPLAINING THE ISSUES, AND THEN YOU JUST GO IN THERE AND POINT OUT, YOU KNOW, THIS IS WHAT YOU SAID HERE, AND THIS IS WHAT YOU SAID HERE, CAN YOU COMMENT ON THIS AS A PHYSICIAN.

BARBARA SILVESTONE: >> THAT'S GREAT. THAT'S GREAT. I THINK IT LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE TIME FOR JUST ONE MORE AUDIENCE QUESTION. AND SO, THIS ONE SORT OF SUMS IT UP A LOT. BUT IT SAYS, ARE THERE ANY OTHER INHERENT ASPECTS OF THE DISABILITY PROCESS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE FOR AN UNREPRESENTED CLAIMANT, PARTICULARLY THOSE THAT MIGHT FACE BARRIERS? IF SO, ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING THESE BARRIERS? SO, LET'S SEE. INHERENT ASPECTS OF THE DISABILITY PROCESS. WE'VE TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE CONFUSING NOTICES, OR AT LEAST WE DID WHEN WE WERE PREPARING. I THINK WE ALSO SPOKE TODAY ABOUT SOME OF THE CONFUSING NOTICES THAT ARE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT, WHETHER THEY'RE IN A LANGUAGE THAT THE CLAIMANT DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, OR EVEN IF THEY'RE IN ENGLISH, THAT THEY ARE HARD TO FOLLOW. I DON'T KNOW IF ANYBODY WANTS TO PICK UP ON THAT, OR ON ANOTHER ASPECT THAT --

REZ ISLAM: >> I MEAN, I THINK THAT REPRESENTATION AT ALL LEVELS OF THE PROCESS ARE BENEFICIAL, YOU KNOW. BECAUSE GETTING SOCIAL -- GETTING APPROVED FOR SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS IS A VERY TECHNICAL THING, YOU KNOW. IT'S NOT JUST SOMETHING THAT, YOU KNOW, CLIENTS COME IN AND DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEIR NEIGHBOR MIGHT GET IT BUT THEY DON'T. YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW WHAT THEIR ACTUAL MEDICAL TREATMENT IS. YOUR -- YOU KNOW, WE HAVE TO -- THERE'S A LOT, NOT JUST STARTING WITH THE NOTICES, BUT WITH UNDERSTANDING THE LISTINGS, THE RULES, AND EVERYTHING THAT GOES INVOLVED, EVERYTHING THAT'S INVOLVED IN GETTING A SOCIAL SECURITY CASE APPROVED. I THINK REPRESENTATION IS POSSIBLY ESSENTIAL AT ALL LEVELS, YOU KNOW. IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL IF WE COULD GET REPRESENTATION AT THE APPLICATION, RECON, HEARING, ESPECIALLY. GUARANTEE, YOU KNOW, MAKE SURE THAT'S PROVIDED IN SOME WAY WOULD BE HUGELY BENEFICIAL TO THOSE APPLYING. BUT I THINK THAT'S -- I DON'T KNOW IF ANYONE HAS ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD.

JACKIE DAI: >> I THINK -- THIS IS JACKIE -- JUST SIMPLIFYING COMMUNICATION ALL AROUND, WHETHER IT'S ORAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE TELEPHONE, COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE NOTICES, REWRITING THE NOTICES SO IT'S IN EASY-TO-READ FASHION, OR EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND FASHION. AND IF THERE'S OUTREACH THAT'S DONE CONDUCTED BY THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, TO MAKE SURE THAT OUTREACH MATERIALS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE, INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> SO --

LAURA SIGAUD: >> OH, SORRY.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> DOES ANYONE WANT TO SAY SOMETHING QUICKLY?

LAURA SIGAUD: >> YES. WE'VE ALREADY DISCUSSED IT, AND THAT IS ONE INHERENT ASPECT THAT IS DISADVANTAGEOUS IS THAT WE DON'T HAVE ACCESS AT THE LOWER LEVELS OF THE AGENCY TO THE ELECTRONIC FILE, ESPECIALLY WHEN A CLAIMANT IS UNREPRESENTED. AND ANOTHER THING I WOULD SUGGEST IS MAYBE LOOK INTO SOME RETRAINING WITH REGARDS TO THE FIELD OFFICERS. BECAUSE I'VE HAD AT LEAST TWO OR THREE SSI ONLY CASES THAT WERE ELIGIBLE FOR DISABLED ADULT CHILD BENEFITS, BUT WE HAD TO HAVE THE CLAIMANTS GO BACK INTO THE OFFICE, FILE THEM, AND ASK FOR THAT FILING TO BE DEEMED, THE FILING OF THEIR ORIGINAL APPLICATION. SO THAT WOULD BE ANOTHER CONSIDERATION IS TO REALLY TRAIN THE FIELD OFFICE ON HOW TO VET THOSE CASES.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> GREAT. WE HAVE HAD A FANTASTIC DISCUSSION TODAY. AND I WANT TO THANK YOU, NICOLE, DAN, JACKIE, DORIS, REZ, AND LAURA, AS WELL AS EVERYBODY AT SOCIAL SECURITY WHO HAS ORGANIZED THIS FOR YOUR VALUABLE TIME AND YOUR FEEDBACK THAT YOU PROVIDED TO ASSIST SOCIAL SECURITY TO STRENGTHEN THE DISABILITY PROGRAM. I TRUST THAT EVERYONE JOINING US TODAY FOUND IT BENEFICIAL AND INFORMATIVE, AND I WANT TO THANK SOCIAL SECURITY FOR THE INVITATION AND FOR ALLOWING ME TO PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME OF THIS IMPORTANT INFORMATION. NOW LET ME TURN IT BACK OVER TO DARLYNDA BOGLE, OUR ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER IN THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS, FOR SOME CLOSING REMARKS. AGAIN, THANK YOU, EVERYONE, AND DARLYNDA, I TURN IT OVER TO YOU.

DARLYNDA BOGLE: >> OKAY. THANK YOU. FOR SOME REASON I'M NOT ABLE TO ACTIVATE MY CAMERA. CAN YOU STILL HEAR ME OKAY?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> WE CAN HEAR YOU.

DARLYNDA BOGLE:>> OKAY. SO MAYBE SOMEBODY OUT THERE CAN FIX THAT WHILE I'M JUST CLOSING US OUT HERE. BUT I DID WANT TO GO AHEAD AND THANK BARBARA AND ALL OF THE PANELISTS. THIS WAS REALLY A GREAT DISCUSSION, VERY ENGAGING. AND JUST ON THAT ISSUE OF ENGAGEMENT, YOU ALL SHOULD KNOW THAT YOU'VE PARTICIPATED IN AN NDF WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF REGISTRATIONS OF ANY THAT WE'VE HAD TO DATE, A VERY STRONG SHOWING IN BOTH OUR AFTERNOON -- OUR MORNING AND AFTERNOON SESSIONS. SEVERAL CALLED IN FOR EACH OF THEM, SO JUST REALLY A GOOD DISCUSSION AND WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR INTEREST AND ALL OF YOUR ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES --

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> OH, WE LOST YOU. DARLYNDA, I THINK YOU WENT MUTE. LET ME SEE. DOES SOMEONE ELSE FROM SOCIAL SECURITY WANT TO COMPLETE THE CLOSING REMARKS?

DARLYNDA BOGLE:>> AM I BACK NOW?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> YES, YOU ARE.

DARLYNDA BOGLE: >> SORRY. I DON'T KNOW WHERE I WENT OUT AND WHAT OCCURRED. [LAUGHTER] DID ANYBODY HEAR ME TALK ABOUT HOW THIS HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST NDF THAT WE'VE HAD?

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> YES.

DARLYNDA BOGLE: >> OKAY.

>> WE DID HEAR THAT.

DARLYNDA BOGLE: >> OKAY. ALL RIGHT. I DID WANT TO GET THAT IN AGAIN. I'M REAL PLEASED WITH THAT. SO, ALL RIGHT. SO, ASSUMING I'M STILL ON HERE, LET ME KNOW, SOMEBODY EMAIL -- HERE WE GO. ALL RIGHT. SO JUST WANTED TO COVER JUST A FEW BRIEF ANNOUNCEMENTS. YOU'RE GOING TO GET AN EMAIL AFTER TODAY WITH A LINK TO AN EVALUATION FORM. WE REALLY WANT YOU TO FILL THAT OUT. WE REALLY APPRECIATE THE FEEDBACK WE GET FROM THAT. THAT EMAIL SECONDLY IS GOING TO HAVE A LINK TO OUR ONLINE FORUM THAT WE CALL ENGAGE SSA. SEVERAL OF YOU, IF YOU'VE BEEN ON ANY OF OUR PRIOR ENGAGEMENTS, YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THIS. BUT THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY AFTER THE FACT TO JUST CHIME IN WITH ANY ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS, SEE ANY INPUT FROM OTHERS, AS WELL, AND JUST, YOU KNOW, SORT OF KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING AND GIVE US SOME VALUABLE FEEDBACK. AND THE LAST THING IS, WE HAVE BEEN WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ABLE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER DURING THEIR "ABLE TO SAVE" PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN THE LAST MONTH. MANY OF YOU MIGHT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE ABLE ACCOUNTS. THOSE ARE TAX ADVANTAGE SAVINGS ACCOUNTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. THEY CAN USE THOSE ACCOUNTS FOR SAVINGS, FOR QUALIFIED DISABILITY EXPENSES, LIKE FOOD AND HOUSING, AND THE SAVINGS WON'T COUNT AS INCOME OR REDUCE THEIR SSI BENEFITS. SO AGAIN, WE PARTNERED WITH THEM TO SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR "ABLE TO SAVE" CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AND WE JUST WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO VISIT ABLENRC.ORG TO GET MORE INFORMATION. SO AGAIN, THANKS SO MUCH. SORRY ABOUT THAT LITTLE TECHNICAL GLITCH AT THE END THERE. APPRECIATE YOU JOINING US, AND JUST ALL GO OUT THERE, CONTINUE TO BE SAFE, AND ENJOY THE REST OF YOUR DAY.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE: >> THANK YOU.

DARLYNDA BOGLE: >> LATER NOW.

JAMES EDRINGTON: >> THANK YOU, AND THE NATIONAL DISABILITY FORUM HAS CONCLUDED. HAVE A GREAT DAY.